

Mock Elections

**Classroom
Curriculum**



VOTE

Lesson Plan

Midterm Elections: The Impact of Local and National Issues

Background, Activities and Critical Analysis

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Subject areas: secondary civics, current events, social studies, political science, and communication arts, and journalism classes

Estimated Time: Three 90-minute class periods or 5-6 45-minute class periods

Lesson Objectives:

Students will:

1. Participate in a class discussion about the right to vote and the significance of midterm elections
2. Participate in a class brainstorming session to list specific national, state, and local midterm election issues that may be of interest to voters in the upcoming midterm elections
3. Work in pairs/small groups to conduct research about a specific midterm election issue and the localized impact of this issue on voters, discuss various points of view about this information, and create a unique product that can be used to teach others about this midterm election issue including the group's opinions about the issue, and the localized impact of the issue
4. Share their products with classmates
5. Analyze the impact of the midterm election products that are shared and provide constructive feedback about the quality and content of the project
6. Cast ballots to select a midterm election product to be submitted to NewsHour Extra
7. Re-examine their personal opinions about the importance of voting and the impact of a single vote by participating in a class discussion or completing a short written response

To make these lesson plans better

Correlation to **National Standards**

Materials:

National, State and Local Issues worksheet (**printer-friendly PDF**)

Internet access to National Issues Background Reports provided by Online NewsHour available at

<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/vote2006/issues/index.html>

Internet access to the Online NewsHour Vote 2006 complete coverage available at

<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/vote2006/index.html>

Midterm Elections Project Guide and Project Ballot (**printer-friendly PDF**)

Internet and other primary library resources, including local and regional newspapers and magazines, audio and video recording equipment, desktop publishing software, assorted art supplies

Procedure:

1. To create student interest in the midterm elections topic, have students complete the phrase and answer the question based upon their opinions about voting. Students should be prepared to discuss their responses with the class. **"Voting is...."**
2. Facilitate a short discussion about voting based on students' responses to "Voting is...." Some of the responses generated could include: "....a responsibility, a right, a chance to voice your opinion, a waste of time, not important", etc. Be sure that part of the discussion focuses on differing opinions about the voting process.
3. Explain to students that because this is a midterm election, the presidential race will not be the major focus of the election season. Rather, other hot-button topics and state and local issues will be in the forefront of voters' minds. Facilitate a short discussion about midterm elections so that students understand why we have them by focusing on questions such as:

What is a midterm election?

Elections that take place between presidential elections and mark the half-way point in a president's term

Why don't we just elect everyone at the same time, once every four years?

By staggering the elections and creating different term lengths (House = 2 years, Senate = 6 years, President = 4 years) it allows for balance and consistency in government. Midterm elections also allow voters to focus more attention on state and local candidates and issues.

Who is elected in a midterm election?

The entire House of Representatives is selected at this time as well as 1/3 of the Senate. In addition, many state (governor, state representatives, etc.) and local (county commissioners, mayors, etc.) positions are filled based on the results of these elections.

Why do we select members to the House of Representatives every two years?

These seats are assigned based on the population of the state (there are 435 members in the House) and are designed to reflect the mood of voters in the states they represent.

Why do we give Senators a 6 year term?

Because each state is represented equally in the Senate (2 seats), those elected are considered to be the "senior" members of Congress. This group is supposed to be a more reflective body in the lawmaking process.

4. Write the words "National", "State", and "Local" on the board or overhead. Distribute the **National, State and Local Issues worksheet**. As a class, work to brainstorm a list of key national, state, and local election issues that are likely to interest voters and get them to the polls. Have students record these on the chart that appears on the handout while you record them on the board or overhead.

5. Explain to students that now that a number of national, state, and local election issues have been listed, they will be working in pairs or small groups to learn more about one specific issue of their choice. Distribute the **Midterm Elections Project Guide worksheet** and explain to the students that they will need to use Internet and other primary source materials to answer questions about the specific issue they have chosen. Explain that local and regional newspapers and magazine will be extremely important in this research because those sources will help students to see the impact of the issue they have selected through the eyes of local voters. Provide students with class time (approx. 45 minutes) as well

as homework time (overnight) to complete their research. All members of the group should record complete answers to each research question.

6. After research is completed, pair/groups should be provided with additional class time to discuss their research findings, their personal opinions, and information about how people in their school and community could be directly or indirectly impacted by the election issue they have researched. Be sure to note that students may have differing opinions about the issues within their groups/pairs, and that all opinions should be heard, respected, and considered.

7. Direct students to the Midterm Elections Project Guide and review the options for the various types of projects they can create to teach others about the issue they have researched and share their opinions about the issue. Stress the fact that high quality projects are a must, as they will be shared with classmates and potentially with a much larger audience if they are chosen to be submitted to the NewsHour Extra Web site. If possible, provide students with class time and time away from school to plan and prepare their projects.

8. When all groups/pairs have completed their projects, they should be shared with classmates. In their presentation, each pair/group should briefly explain the election issue that is the basis for the project. Basic information about each issue should be shared, including the local impact of the issue. Products should be shared with the class and each student should complete a Project Ballot to provide feedback about the various products and select what they believe is the best product to be submitted to NewsHour Extra.

9. To provide closure to the lesson, go back to the two activities students completed in Step 1 above. Facilitate a class discussion or ask students to complete a short written response to the questions below:

Has the way you would complete the phrase "Voting is...." changed as a result of what you have learned and experienced by completing this lesson? Why or why not?

Extension Activities:

- 1.** Contact your local/county election board to send representative to the classroom to discuss the importance of participation in midterm elections as well as the procedure for voter registration in your county. Have the representative bring samples of the necessary forms/paperwork that must be completed in order to vote. Have the representative discuss deadlines for voter registration as well as the locations and hours for voting during the upcoming midterm election. If possible, have the representative bring sample ballots to show students what they will encounter in the voting booth. The election board representative should explain how to complete the ballots and the process used in your county for tabulating and verifying election results. If students will be legally able to vote in the midterm election (as is the case with some high school students), see if the election board representative can provide the opportunity for students to complete voter registration at the time of their classroom visit.
- 2.** Take students on a field trip to the local county election board. Have them speak to county election officials about the voting process, see ballots and/or voting machines, and discuss all of the information described in activity 1 above.
- 3.** Examine the role of the media in the election process by finding examples of and discussing how media increases awareness about political issues, persuades voters, and reflects the American attitudes about politics, political figures, and the right to vote.

Correlation to National Standards

McRel Compendium of K-12 Standards Addressed:

Civics

Standard 7: Understands alternative forms of representation and how they serve the purposes of constitutional government

Standard 17: Understands issues concerning the relationship between state and local governments and the national government and issues pertaining to representation at all three levels of government

Standard 19: Understands what is meant by "the public agenda", how it is set, and how it is influenced by public opinion and the media

Standard 20: Understands the role of political parties, campaigns, elections, and associations and groups in American politics

Standard 27: Understands how certain character traits enhance citizens' ability to fulfill personal and civic responsibilities

Language Arts

Writing

Standard 1: Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process

Standard 4: Gathers and uses information for research purposes

Standard 5: Uses the general skills and strategies of the reading process

Standard 7: Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of informational texts

Listening and Speaking

Standard 8: Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes

Viewing

Standard 9: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media

Standard 10: Understands the characteristics and components of the media

Working with Others

Standard 1: Contributes to the overall effort of a group

Standard 2: Uses conflict-resolution techniques

Standard 4: Displays effective interpersonal communication skills

Standard 5: Demonstrates leadership skills

Thinking and Reasoning

Standard 1: Understands and applies the basic principles of presenting an argument

Standard 6: Applies decision-making techniques

Technology

Standard 1: Knows the characteristics and uses of computer hardware and operating systems

Standard 3: Understands the relationships among science, technology, society, and the individual

Standard 6: Understands the nature and uses of different forms of technology



Name: _____

Date: _____

Midterm Election Project Guide

Directions: Using the Internet and other primary library resources including local and regional newspapers and magazines, conduct research about a mid-year election issue and how it will impact local voters. Be sure to examine all sides of the issue and varying points of view about the topic as you complete your research. Write complete answers to each question and be sure to document your sources of information, particularly facts and statistics and the use of quotes.

Midterm Election Topic being researched: _____

1. What are the various points of view/opinions about this election topic? List them below and document the source of this information in the appropriate column.

Point of View	Source Documentation

2. What are the facts about this election topic. Record them below and document the source of information in the appropriate area.

Facts	Source Documentation

3. In what ways could local residents/voters be **directly** impacted by the results of this midterm election topic? List as many specific examples as possible.

4. In what ways could local residents/voters be **indirectly** impacted by the results of this midterm election topic? List as many specific examples as possible.

5. What are your feelings/opinions about this topic and how it relates to the midterm elections?

6. Do you think the midterm election topic will have a significant impact on national, state, or local election results? Explain why.

7. In the space below, record any additional information or ideas you have related to this midterm election topic.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Midterm Election Project Guide (continued)

Your research is completed, and you have participated in a pairs/small group discussion about your group's findings, ideas, and opinions about your midterm election topic. Now you will work together to create a project that can be used to teach others about this midterm election issue. Specific information and steps are provided below.

- ☐ Your goal is to share factual information along with your group's opinions about the midterm election issue you have researched.
- ☐ The project should be very high quality and reflect thought and creativity
- ☐ In your project, the following should be easily identifiable:
 - the mid-year election issue you are discussing
 - the group's opinions about this issue
 - facts, statistics, case studies, or other information that can be used to support opinions
 - how people in your area may be impacted by this issue either directly or indirectly by this midterm election issue
 - how you think this mid-year election issue will impact the nation as a whole

The following list contains ideas for the types of projects that could be created and shared with others:

- ☐ podcasts**, videos, or audio-taped:
 - editorials
 - moderated debates showing both sides of the election issue
 - student interviews featuring the opinions and ideas of students within the group
 - public service announcements
 - political advertisements
 - performance of original songs that reflect the opinions surrounding the election issue
 - OTHER: see the teacher to discuss other ideas your pair/group would like to develop

**For specific information about podcasting, see "Podcasting—Sharing Your Ideas About Featured Topics and Issues" at <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/teachers/lessonplans/media/podcasting.html>. Pay special attention to Part 3: Producing Your Own Podcast

When creating your project, keep the following guidelines in mind:

- ☐ The project should be 1 to 5 minutes in length
- ☐ All group members should be actively involved in the production of the project
- ☐ All group members should have a speaking role of some kind as part of the project
- ☐ The ideas and opinions of each group member should be included in the project
- ☐ Projects should reflect high quality, meaning they are easily to see and hear when being viewed or heard
- ☐ All students will complete a **Project Ballot** that provides each group with specific feedback about their project
- ☐ All students will complete a **Project Ballot** to select what they believe is the best project in the class to be sent to NewsHour Extra for possible use in their on-air or Web site content

Name: _____ Date: _____

Project Ballot

Directions: As you listen to or view each of the group projects, complete the ballot below. Your first priority is to provide each pair/group with feedback about their project. After all presentations have been made, you will cast your ballot for the project you think should be submitted to NewsHour Extra for use in their programming or on the Web site.

Pair/Group Members	Midterm Election Topic	Pair/Group's Opinions about the Topic	What was the best thing about this project?	What suggestions do you have for improving this project?

Write the names of the pair/group members whose project should be submitted to NewsHour Extra. _____



Name: _____

Date: _____

National, State and Local Issues

Directions: As part of a class brainstorming session, record a list of important national, state, and local election issues that might interest voters in the upcoming midterm election.

National Election Issues	State Election Issues	Local Election Issues